

# COLLECTION OVERVIEW

## AMERICAN HISTORY

### I. SCOPE

This overview of the Library's collections deals with general American history from the early exploration of the western hemisphere to the present United States. American history subject matter research described in this overview includes federal and public history (both prior to and after 1789); regional, state, local history; and military, intellectual, religious, social, and economic history of this country. The Library collects comprehensively in this subject, with very little exclusion. The Library also has strong book and non-book collections, particularly digital collections in areas relating to American history, including visual arts, music, popular culture, and traditional culture. Representative titles and editions of textbooks and other educational materials are collected only below the college level. Titles of strictly local interest that are self-published or vanity press materials are collected as they are a part of the regional and local history collections. Self-published and vanity press materials are generally not collected by the Library.

### II. SIZE

As the de facto national library and copyright depository of the United States for over one hundred years, the Library of Congress holds unparalleled resources for the study of American history in all its aspects. These resources include many thousands of books, periodicals, and journals, in addition to thousands of American newspapers, and very extensive government documents collections not only for federal, but for state, regional, and local government. Other resources include extremely rich and extensive collections of manuscripts, a variety of non-book materials, and digital resources which contribute to the understanding of American history. A conservative estimate of cataloged books directly relating to American history would be 600,000, but beyond this an item count becomes very difficult, since so much of the collection is important in one way or another to the study of American history.

Selected Statistics on Cataloged Holdings	
American history	est. 120,000
American regional, state, and local history	est. 130,000
American military history	est. 110,000

(Statistics compiled from reports generated by the Library's Voyager Integrated Library System as of 2007.)

### III. GENERAL RESEARCH STRENGTHS

The Library's collections in American history are distinguished not only by the size, but by their all-encompassing scope and the consistency with which the collections have been

developed over time. The Library of Congress has had an historical commitment to maintaining an archival collection that reflects the historiographic trends of the country. The Library's collections are completely inclusive for American history and include a full range of foreign and domestic critical writing about the United States, its policies, history, culture, and peoples.

#### **IV. AREAS OF DISTINCTION**

Special aspects of the collections that deserve mention include vast holdings of U.S. government publications, American newspapers, and American doctoral research (the latter in both digital format and in microform). The *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers* collection provides online access to newspaper pages from 1897 to 1910 from selected states (all states will ultimately be represented in this collection). Many early American imprints and first editions are held in the general and rare book collections. These holdings are supplemented by subscription and purchased electronic databases and by microfilm reproductions of titles not owned in the original by the Library. Of merit also are the extensive special format materials in the custody of the special collection divisions (for a discussion of these, see related collection overviews).

#### **V. ELECTRONIC RESOURCES**

The Library's ever expanding digital collections covering all aspects of American history are unparalleled. The American Memory historical collections provide online access to the papers of four American presidents, historic government documents, photographs, personal narratives, sound recordings, sheet music, maps, and literature, all documenting events in American history and culture as well as the lives of well-known and everyday Americans. The Veterans History Project's primary mission is to collect first hand accounts of U.S. Veterans from World War I, World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the Persian Gulf War, and the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq and to make these stories available online. The Library's Web Archives Project presents collections of archived web sites selected by subject specialists on specific topics. Web archive collections include the September 11, 2001 web archive, United States national elections (including governor races) since 2000, and web archives of all United States congressional websites beginning with the 107<sup>th</sup> Congress.

Electronic resources are increasingly important to the Library's American history collections. Some of these resources provide online access to materials from the Library's collections that have been digitized or were available on microfilm/fiche. Other online resources allow the Library to expand its offerings in American history by accessing material from the holdings of other libraries and institutions from around the country and the world. Representative electronic resources in American history include, but are not limited to *American History & Life*, *American Civil War Research Database*, *American Periodicals Series*, *Archives USA*, *Early American Imprints, Series I and II*, *History Cooperative*, *JSTOR*, *Making of the Modern World, 1450-1850*, *Nineteenth Century Masterfile*, *North American Women's Letters & Diaries*, *Sabin-Americana, 1500-1926*.

For a complete list of the Library's electronic resources, see the Electronic Resources page on the Library's web site.

## **VI. WEAKNESSES/EXCLUSIONS**

The Library's collections for American history are both unique and uniquely comprehensive. Nevertheless there are areas where the collections are incomplete, inconsistent, or simply not exhaustive. For example, holdings of the indexes and transcripts of state, regional and local records and state, regional and local government documents may not be as strong as they once were. The Library is concerned about the difficulty in obtaining many documents from state and local sources that are born digital and therefore do not exist in paper form. As each state and local government has its own individual policy about maintaining and archiving government documents and records it becomes increasingly challenging for the Library to acquire these materials.

The collections of American religious history are not strong in publications by and about smaller sects, cults, and non-western religions; small and alternative presses, which are important for the study of social and economic history, are not well represented. In the area of military history, smaller institutions have more complete holdings of unit and regimental histories of local interest. This is also true of the many libraries and historical organizations that focus specifically on regional events and interests.